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CHAPTER NINETEEN

OTHER DRAGONS OR DRAGON OTHERS? A CULTURAL VIEW OF THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

BY CHRIS CAIRNEY

The Loch Ness monster is a familiar concept for most native English speakers and perhaps also for anyone, English-speaking or not, who participates actively or even passively in Western society. One would have to have been living a sheltered life indeed to not have heard of and therefore formed a mental image of the Loch Ness monster, and that construct probably proves fairly consistent, person-to-person, among the contemporary initiated; you may not believe it exists, but you certainly know what it is supposed to look like. So the Loch Ness monster is a deliciously postmodern concept. It exists fairly consistently in everybody's head even though it has never been shown to actually exist (Hamper). But does the fact that it has never been shown to exist even matter anymore? Arguably not: the aesthetic requirement for the *possibility* of its existence apparently trumps any need to actually show proof, despite a long history of patient photographers haunting the shores of the loch and despite recent organized attempts (utilizing expensive electronic surveillance equipment) to do just that, to show proof ("Loch Ness Monster" 2007, 394–95).

There is Gaelic folklore (Westwood and Kingshill 2011, x), and there is a solitary ancient account of a yet more ancient, and vague, monster at the River Ness (Sharp 1995, 175–76), but the idea of the Loch Ness monster as we know it begins with a newsprint account of a sighting on the loch-side in 1933 (Campbell 1997, 13; "Is the Loch Ness Monster Dead" 2014).[1] This was the bombshell report by the anonymous reporters (later revealed to be John and Aldie Mackay, managers of the loch-side Drumnadrochit Hotel) of a sighting made on April 28, 1933 of the multiple humps of something "whale-like" splashing furiously in the loch waters. The article reporting the sighting was published May 2, 1933 in the

Inverness Courier. The one who wrote the article itself, based upon the Mackays' story, was Alex Campbell, a part-time writer for the *Inverness Courier*. There had been a slightly earlier report from 1930—which had also found its way into the *Inverness Courier*—but there had been no sighting of a creature, only the mysterious "waves" and "splashing" that caused speculative alarm about an unseen "monster" (Loxton and Prothero 2015, 127). Alex Campbell, being associated with the *Inverness Courier*, was probably aware of the earlier (1930) report of the unsighted "monster" in the Loch (127–28). He also knew the Mackays of Drumnadrochit and wrote the story of the Mackays' sighting for the newspaper—and thus the legend was primed to germinate. It was now a "fearsome monster" that had lived "for generations" in the Gothic gloom of the loch-side. The description was progressively sensationalized, a fish story if you will (if you are going to have a monster who wants a small one?), and so somehow the mysterious whale-like creature of the sighting by the Mackays became the larger monster of Campbell's article.

Then, in July of the same year, George Spicer and his wife reported seeing a car-sized creature crossing the road in front of their vehicle while driving along the loch. He wrote a letter about his sighting to the *Inverness Courier*, and it was published on August 4, 1933. The creature they saw had, according to their report, a body so large that "it took up all the road" in front of them and had also "a very long neck" (132). This is significant because it is the first report of a "long-necked" creature in Loch Ness (the previous reports had been of a fish-like or whale-like creature). The *Inverness Courier* published George Spicer's letter under the title: "Is this the Loch Ness Monster?" So George Spicer, with the aid, perhaps, of some suggestive long-necked monster movies like *The Lost World* (1925) and *King Kong* (which Spicer had seen not long before his sighting), set the stage for the modern long-necked Nessie. But it was the so-called "surgeon's photograph" of 1934 (that iconic, grainy, black-and-white photograph of Nessie with a long neck, since debunked) which solidified and gave birth to the image of Nessie in the popular imagination. If movies and well-circulated pictures here had such an effect on reality as apprehended in the popular imagination, then the Nessie of 1933–1934 is a signature, media-induced, post-modern moment. More "sightings" in or near the loch ensued, followed by more newspaper stories and published images. So the legend as we know it was gradually built up by the media, creating and then cementing an image in everybody's mind, and all of this eventually coalesced into Nessie as we know her today. People were clearly fascinated and soon became hooked on this (if not "created" then media-augmented) gothic mystery. Culturally speaking, the timing was

clearly right as we can see now looking back on the development of the legend since 1933.

This is the Nessie that has had a prolific life since then in print media, in movies, on television, on the Internet, and in retail (Walker 1999, 731). Nessie has been the object of much love and interest, so much so that inevitably studies have been done, some quite extensive, to try to prove her existence ("BBC 'Proves'" 2003; "On this Day" 2007). Not only have all attempts to actually find the monster failed, but a number of the pictures have also been proven to have been purposefully faked, harming the credibility of a tourist industry that depends on establishing an "it might be real" belief in the minds of people (Cohen 1996, viii). People all over the world, not just in English-speaking countries, seem to want very much to believe in the Loch Ness monster's actual existence. For some reason, we all love it very much, and our interest virtually *wills* the monster into actual existence. Here is where Nessie becomes a postmodern cultural phenomenon (Baudrillard 2012). In the absence of any proof, this *belief* in the Loch Ness monster must rest on these several points already alluded to: a folklore record of kelpies and "water-horses" and a belief that the Loch Ness monster "must be real" because of public knowledge of and familiarity with the fossilized bones of (and eventual cinematographic recreation of) pleosaurs or plesiosaurs (Campbell 1997, 14).[2]

These two points above don't really hold water because the first (kelpies or water-horses), by its very nature, contradicts the second, plesiosaurs. Water-horses that shape-change, fly, carry riders, and look like horses have little to do with ancient plesiosaurs, the chosen form of the Loch Ness monster since 1933 (Westwood and Kingshill 2011, 364–373). And kelpies have no more evidence for their existence than do modern Scottish plesiosaurs—so you can't point to something that doesn't exist in order to prove that something else does exist, particularly when the claimed creatures in question are alleged to look quite different and act quite differently from each other. Kelpies or water-horses are folklore attributed to all lochs rather than peculiar to Loch Ness (Rose 2001; Douglas 2007; Johnson 2017). So, thinking only with excitement about the would-be corroborative evidence that "there is a folklore record of water monsters at Loch Ness," folks look rather quickly past these contradictions and seize upon a third point in the Loch Ness monster "triangle of evidence," the lynchpin story of St. Columba. Here we refer specifically to the monster section of the *Vita Columbae*, the late-seventh-century biography of St. Columba (*Colm Cille* in Gaelic). This third point holds the others together as "go to," ready, "corroborative evidence" for the Loch Ness monster. It is the only purely textual and historical

representation of a monster at or near Loch Ness that Nessie believers can point to in order to assert evidence of a historical character. Detach this one from the second point (possibly surviving plesiosaurs) and the first point (the already separated idea of the kelpie or water-horse being germane to a Loch Ness monster argument), and the triangle of points used to advocate for the existence of the monster falls apart. There is simply less reason to willfully ignore the tenuous connection of the first two points to each other if the third point is removed from the supposed "triangle of proof."

So, after the supposed sightings of 1933 and following, and also after the eventual photographs purporting to show the monster, people pointed to three items to implicitly provide a corroborating context for these sudden modern sightings: plesiosaurs, vaguely supported in the background by "sea-monster" stories; Gaelic oral traditions of kelpies or water-horses, presumably quite ancient, and a single textual source: the account of a water monster in the River Ness recorded in a late 7th century CE Latin text entitled the *Vita Columbae* by St. Adomnán. Examination of why the *Vita Columbae*, the only textual source available to be offered as evidence of the Loch Ness monster before 1933, cannot be used to give legitimacy, or even be used to imply legitimacy, for an argument in favor of the existence or possible existence of the Loch Ness monster will point more and more to the "foreign" and actually misunderstood nature of the Irish-language cultural sources, the ogham and pictographs on stone and the matching—and now recorded—Gaelic folklore about kelpies and water-horses. These cultural sources cannot be, with any accuracy, simply or naïvely interpreted—or even interpreted as literal at all—by those perhaps somewhat unfamiliar with the Irish provenance/provenience of such symbol stones or folklore, which as we have already seen look less and less attractive as an underpinning of the modern Loch Ness monster (Stephens 1990, 545–71) .[3]

St. Columba's Monster in the *Vita Columbae*

As we have seen, outside of the folkloric or oral tradition, the earliest *textual* reference to a Loch Ness monster is in the *Vita Columbae* or "Life of Columba," a hagiography of Iona's founder, St. Columba, by St. Adomnán of Iona, himself Abbot of Iona from 679 to 704. The part of this work we are interested in involves a visit by St. Columba (*Colm Cille*) to the *River* Ness. This story is a "false friend" to the modern *Loch* Ness monster story because it has nothing to do with Loch Ness at all, being only figurative in nature, not a literal story, and referencing something

specifically required to be *not* Loch Ness in order to attain its intended ideological effect. The story seems straightforward: local people were burying a victim of an attack by a monster. They explained that the man had been attacked by a water beast. They had tried to rescue him from a boat, but could only recover his torn body. St. Columba shocked the locals by immediately sending his follower into the water. The monster came to attack the swimmer, as the story is told, but St. Columba made the sign of the cross and called to the monster saying: "Go no further. Do not touch the man. Go back at once." The beast, we are told, “immediately stopped as if pulled back with ropes" and fled: “Everyone on the riverbank, missionaries and locals, praised God for the miracle” (Sharp 1995, 175–76).

By virtue of the use made by St. Columba, according to St. Adomnán, of this pagan water spirit (represented in this story, of course, as a literal monster), Adomnán sets up the agonistic dichotomy between the Christian and the pre-Christian in this locale, and the locals are presumably convinced to be “converted.” It is not a *forced* conversion, though there is advantageous *manipulation* of the circumstances by St. Columba. The use made of the water spirit by St. Adomnán—attributing certain actions to St. Columba—leads to the communication of an aesthetic and leads to change or modification of some ideological status quo. Going forward diachronically and ideologically, Adomnán himself, more than a century later, makes a possibly old story current and makes it resonate contemporaneously as an ideological message attached to an established folk motif (the story as the vehicle): existing stories of water-horses or kelpies. This use of something old to say something new makes the story resonate for folk in the contemporaneous linguistic community or in the local linguistic culture of St. Adomnán in the west of what is now Scotland. Thus, the story St. Adomnán gives us is mainly exemplary, an example of the classic heroic-age technique employed by teaching priests in Britain (think “The Dream of the Rood”) and perhaps more generally in the context of Christian evangelism, historically, or possibly in other proselytizing syncretic churches (as opposed to those religions or churches that become established by force and fiat) (Fernández-Armesto 2009; Cassidy 1993). Suddenly, the *figurative* is the unmarked sense of the story, rather than the *literal*, a reversal of semantic and narratological markedness that allows Adomnán to make new meaning with the same story, given its contextual Christian associations and implications contemporaneously. This proposed figurative purpose (rather than literal or “factual,” though in its way no less “true”) makes me think of the parable of “George Washington and the Cherry Tree,” as Andrew

Delbanco points out in the *New York Times*: "What we now think of as classic American literature was one means by which the nation established itself in the imagination of its citizens. The process can be followed from the early hagiographers like Mason Weems (who elevated the Swamp Fox, Francis Marion, into the American pantheon and helped secure a place there for George Washington) through patriotic verse by Longfellow and Emerson" (Delbanco 1999).[4] What is meant to be implied by Weems is something like: "be honest and a patriot like George Washington," and by St. Adomnán, "be a person of faith like St. Columba."

George Washington definitely fits the title of a *heavy character* in the cultural analysis of Walter Ong, acting as such in a number of stories from the days of the early Republic (Ong 2012, 44–69). As it is with George Washington stories in America, so it is for St. Columba stories in Scotland—particularly *Gaelic* Scotland: at a time of cultural transition, a *heavy character* is used, and stories, by no means necessarily true, become "one means by which the nation establishes itself in the imagination of its citizens." In such cases, we almost have to privilege a broader, figurative meaning over any proposed literal meaning or over any possible reference to any actual historical event. Regardless of any possible truth in a story,[5] such stories, told years after the "fact," must be said to be mainly exemplary in purpose and of course ideological, rather than historical in the modern intention of the word. In other words, they are political in purpose, not factual or rational. It is not that a Gaelic meaning (messianic, ideological) *then* necessarily has resonance for a reader *now*, but it is important to realize that Gaelic stories—including this one about St. Columba recorded by St. Adomnán—resonated with Gaelic listeners and with readers, priests, and teachers of St. Adomnán's time and place (which was, like the time and place of George Washington in the early United States, a time of paradigm shift) and prior to the marginalization and obfuscation of Gaelic culture in the years after St. Adomnán and leading up to 1933's Loch Ness monster (Clancy 2009, 349; Ellis 1999, 449–69).

Of course, there is a "sheet of opaque glass" between us and the linguistic community that made and reacted to this story contemporaneously with St. Adomnán. Still, this is our problem to embrace if we want to understand the genesis, the cultural meaning and ideological meaning and its genesis in its original provenance culturally and linguistically (and diachronically and synchronically), to understand the formation of the story: why and how *this* story (and even in a processual and predictive way). So, again, this story from the *Vita Columbae* has nothing to do with the modern Nessie, but I would say that for the Loch Ness monster, Columba is a hot button for a different overlay,

now marginalized, obfuscated, and effectively suppressed by eventual bourgeois hegemony and its media-culture aftermath.

Any alternative Columban overlay to the Modern reveals the connection between Ireland and Scotland in terms of historical and cultural continuity (employing an historicist historiography) (Cairney 2008, 101–15). Actually, where the Loch Ness monster is concerned, the name and word "Columba," not being English, must be translated thoroughly to be understood thoroughly, particularly the "Columba" in St. Adomnán's time and place. And what did the "Columba" story mean? Certainly there was contemporaneous ideological content, and certainly, whatever it was, it did not simply match modern parameters of ideological narrative construction—we should not consider "Columba" easy or simple to translate because a translator decides to employ roughly equivalent words that might only touch part of the original word's spectrum of meaning, a semantic spectrum actually tied to time and place and cultural background in the then contemporary context. Who was "Columba"? A prince of the *Cenél Conaill*, a Catholic priest, an abbot and founder of a series of monasteries, a man from a time that (or with an ideology which) may not resonate anymore or may seem not to matter much today. Yet it *does* matter if one wants to understand what "Columba" meant in St. Adomnán's time and place (if not in Columba's own): it involved a provenance that looked westward to Ireland, to Celtic paganism and to St. Patrick, to Gaelic tribal politics and the ideology of the monastic church. This other linguistic reality, viewed through the opaque glass of time, reveals interesting relations we may not have in mind any more—that we, perhaps, cannot imagine because of our own interpolated status as ideologically overdetermined subjects under control of hegemonic forces (which has a processual and deterministically predictive aspect—so we should know *this* case of interpolation, that is interesting, but more important is that it serves as a case study of the processes themselves and how they can work, in other times and places: the idea is to have meta-awareness of the processes by which culture operates or can operate at any time or place potentially).

To understand the text, then, we must do an "archeology" of the text, in the manner of Foucault (Foucault 1994). What was its meaning at the time it was written? Understanding that might shed light on a culturally vestigial monster naïvely linked with today's Loch Ness monster. So we should recover meaning to recover the process of creation and the process now of the attempted linking of the culturally vestigial "Columban" monster with the modern Nessie. Such "textual archeology" is important, because, as Evans-Pritchard noted, even when trying to study other

cultures, people rarely succeed in really entering the mind of the culture they are examining. Instead, they only ascribe to that culture motivations and attributes that match their own culture. People do this naïvely. It is meta-failure, and a failure in self-reflexivity (Olson 1991, 245–68; White 2014).

So, if we think (in a literal, functional and anachronistic way, seeing only how it is *now*) that there must have been, or might have been, a Loch Ness monster at Loch Ness, and we even go out looking for it, we miss the point (Goldschmidt 1966; Radcliffe-Brown 1952) because the answer is *textual* and is in *other texts*—the monster is intertextual in its *origin* and in its *reference*. The monster may also be considered bidirectional in its relationship of influences with its intertexts even as those intertexts are themselves bidirectional in their relationships with readers, synchronically, culturally, and diachronically. There are these two kinds of bidirectional intertextuality, synchronic and diachronic, with both kinds acting dynamically as time goes forward. Because of this, identifiable stories in texts lack stability and surrender to a cultural process of modification over time, and this leads to the production of different or differing texts still identified as "the story of" St. Patrick or St. Columba, while the texts never were or are stable over time because "the story" was never stable in its ideological environment. As culture and language are in flux, so is the story.

The synchronic (pre-Christian and folkloric) aspect of the monster was such that kelpies and water-horses were ubiquitous in any waters within Gaelic-speaking areas, meaning they can be expected to automatically appear in the folklore record where a Celtic language such as Gaelic consistently has or had a territorial foothold for a fairly lengthy period of time—enough to become associated with that area in an ongoing way, in place-names, for instance. So the folkloric presence of a water monster lacks any particular or specific meaning in any one locale until you bring in the use of water monsters by those telling stories of St. Patrick (The island of Ireland as a location) or St. Columba (North Britain as a location). Gaelic here establishes the matrix of thought and the culturally determined ideological parameters or possibilities.[6] The special meaning, ideological and cultural, comes when it applies (diachronically and synchronically) to one locale—in this case, in Adomnán, the River Ness. So there were kelpies or water-horses before, everywhere, but now there is the use of the local-but-ubiquitous water beast, meant to be locational and literal (viewed *literally* in a literary sense and *functionally* in an anthropological sense). Now we have its *figurative* use by St. Adomnán in his story of St. Columba, which has little to do with location or literal (or presumed

functional) cultural meaning because it is intertextual and ideological and points, for its meaning and resonance, *away* from the River Ness to points west, in Ireland, and a *Patrician* meaning.

So the historicist question remains this: in what sense did the monster "exist" and what meaning might be associated with it *then* and in *that locale*? It may appear attractive, and now possible, "archeologically," to see this Columban banishment of the River Ness monster in several ways: *literally* as a record of a brave priest's actual act against a Loch Ness or River Ness water monster and *simultaneously* as Christian "action" against any pagan spirit or deity. So the idea seems to be to both literally and symbolically banish "the monsters," and thereby also attempt to eradicate the pagans by converting them to Christianity by *use* of this story of St. Columba at the River Ness. But that is *still* St. Adomnán's story of St. Columba seen in local provenience to Loch Ness and serving a local purpose: conversion. That is the meaning, in context, of the story about the earlier Columba that the reader of St. Adomnán's time "gets." But this story of conversion is only the tip of it. While the local conversion associated with Columba's (earlier) time is going on in the pages of the story as historical fiction about conversion, Adomnán's purpose is to facilitate a larger paradigm shift in the ideology of Picts, on the one hand, and the Scots on the other.[7] The new paradigm reflects—by means of the story—the ideology being established by the monastic but politically active Columban church of St. Adomnán himself, not by St. Columba.[8] St. Adomnán is *using* St. Columba. So we can understand the process here of ideological formation by which "x" (the understanding by us *now* of St. Adomnán's symbolic-level or metaphorical-level use of the St. Columba story *then*) reveals the obfuscation by what I will call "y" (today's literal proffered interpretation of the monster, where any awareness of the symbolic is obfuscated by our cultural fixation on the literal, at least in this case of the Loch Ness monster). We can see from a processual and deterministic viewpoint a predictable use—a subliminal aggressive political use—of the literal and local *now* by the media in order to obfuscate the past and also *then* by St. Adomnán to create a symbolic but subliminal effect or create an affective ideological response: (1) The literal used today—obfuscating the past; and (2) Adomnán's use then of the literal as a vehicle to carry, by means of symbolism, an implied ideology linked to Ireland.

We need to look beyond the naïve association of St. Adomnán's St. Columba story with a local conversion story and examine the larger purpose of paradigm shift being actively pursued by St. Adomnán, as leader of a Columban church at the forefront of the "Irishification" of the

Picts (Bellesheim 2010, 136). Since water-beast stories are (or were) common all over Scotland and Ireland, we can state that the story, as we have it, is cultural not actual, and that what has happened here textually reflects a literary-ideological process whereby a hagiographic commonplace, a water beast, is being assigned *to* a location (in this case the River Ness), as a useful instructive motif, rather than a process whereby an actual beastie makes its way into an eventual story in the normal or oral/folkloric way.[9] The water beast here is *a priori* rather than locative and descriptive. The Church "came" with a water beast already "ready" to be deployed, already in mind, already used and useful in the work of the Church. The fact that there was water-beast folklore among the pagans of the River Ness was fortunate and opportunistically used by the Church. It was *a priori* not *a posteriori*; it was a deductive use of the hagiographic/ideological commonplace. So, in the end, it is a parable, an allegory. Banish the monsters/the monstrous (meaning pagans). It is symbolic (being cultural not actual), and it is not "at" a location, occurring; it is *to* a location and for an exemplary purpose. The story is manipulated for effect, the text reflecting the ideology and culture of the clerical writer St. Adomnán.[10]

Now we must proceed further with our archeology of the text because, as we have seen, with a text comes the possibility of intertext and intertextual context, along with all the ideological processes, influences and effects. First, in terms of the *Vita Columbae* and intertextual context, we must examine the *Olliphéist*. The *Olliphéist* is a monstrous kind of giant serpent found in areas that produced Gaelic-language texts in a multi-cultural context (Pictish-Norse-Gaelic-English). The Scottish Gaelic equivalent is *Uilepheist.* Here text and intertext, bidirectionally, are going forward in time and outward over the synchronic plane within an always dynamic cultural context. The goal is to subject the *Olliphéist* to a structural or post-structural cultural and ideological analysis including intertextual references to other key Gaelic cultural narratives. What is suggested is an intertextual connection on the part of St. Adomnán's Columba Story to the *Oilliphéist* of Patrick (MacKillop 1998, 312–13). Patrick subdues the *Oilliphéist*. The relationships between the Patrician *Oilliphéist* story, the River Ness monster of St. Columba/St. Adomnán, and presumably pre-existing kelpie/water-horse folklore can be represented by a kind of triangle connecting the three with bidirectional arrows: all the stories are going forward in time with Gaelic cultural currency and with texts providing eventual or occasional "snapshots" (process vs. product). Another intertextual relationship exists between a story of Finn and a story of St. Patrick, both involving the monster known

as the *Caoránach* (67). The latter is like the former, but newer. In the case of the *Caoránach* story, going forward through time, Patrick replaces Finn at the right ideological moment of paradigm shift and by the same process (associative, involving intertexts) by which Columba replaces Patrick in the Adomnán text/Columba Story (which can be thought of as later, but which could—thanks to diachronic intertextuality—be either later or earlier, particularly with regard to stories of Finn and the *Fianna* in Gaelic folklore, folklore which does generate a number of "Finn" texts both synchronically and diachronically) (Heaney 1995, 155–214; Arbuthnot and Parsons 2012; Gaskill 1995; Allen and Allen 1999). So everything the historically earlier St. Patrick did over on the Gaelic island of Ireland in subduing *two* water beasts becomes what St. Columba did in subduing *one* water beastie there in the newly Gaelic area of North Britain which contains the River Ness. In fact, the River Ness sits on the border between Pictish and Gaelic and their corresponding spheres of influence, linguistically, culturally and politically: Alba (Pictland, the Pictish High King) and Argyle (*Earra-Ghàidheal*—Gaelic Speaking and Dalridian but expanding in conjunction with a Columban church tied to the Gaelic *Uí Néill* dynasty) (Sharp 1995, 8–10). Interestingly, then, synchronically and diachronically, both of these "shifts" also "sit" on a pagan/Christian border (Finn/Patrick; Patrick/Columba).

Given the *Caoránach's* addition here to the Patrician story of the *Oilliphéist*, we should add one more, for there seems further intertext as well to the *Muirdris*, a sea monster killed by no less than *Fergus mac Leti/Fergus mac Róich*, who himself dies shortly after of exhaustion, the loch turned red with blood. Further intertext seems applicable to the similar deaths of Beowulf and Thor at the "claws" of a water beast: a dragon (Beowulf) linked to a sea serpent (Thor) (MacKillop 1998, 299; Mabie 2002, 86–9; Heaney 2001, 186–93). And then, along with these high-profile hero-monster pairings—the *Oilliphéist* with Patrick, the *Caoránach* with Patrick and Finn, the *Muirdris* with Fergus (and possibly with both Thor and Beowulf), and St. Columba with the monster of the River Ness—there are the snakes (Bury 2013; Cunliffe 2010; Squire 1905, 227). Snakes may on some level link to Ono the Arch Druid, a religious and historical figure supplanted, peacefully, by St. Patrick.[11] In all the aforementioned hero-monster pairings, the hero overcomes the monster, even if he dies trying, and, by further implication here, all the breathtaking heroes are supplanted in their splendidness *when the time comes* by St. Patrick who is himself replaced in due course by St. Columba, now himself the master of all of that in a political narrative coup of cumulative

intertextual implications orchestrated and authored by the *Uí Néill* author St. Adomnán.

Along with the conventional inclusion of Old Testament snakes *á la* Exodus and Numbers, the Patrician monster stories and their intertexts, including St. Adomnán's story of St. Columba, might be best processed generally as a kind of response, along with the somewhat related snakes, to pagan beliefs in the Gaelic polity itself and also, for Columba/Adomnán, in greater Scotland beyond Argyle or Dalriata. Simultaneously, the stories can be processed as an implicit Gaelic-Christian response to the story of Ragnarök as it was rolled out in the Viking towns and at the same time in the Norse Isles off the coast of Ireland and Scotland. And so St. Columba and his monster at the River Ness are attached to Ireland and St. Patrick and *detached* from Loch Ness and also from the modern Loch Ness monster. A further intertext for St. Columba is his name, which in both Latin and Gaelic means dove, and which also serves as an intertextual allusion to Mathew 10:16: "I send you as sheep into the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves."[12]

In suggesting Columba's narratological and intertextual association with St. Patrick, I point to some of the obvious parallels between the two in terms of the *Oilliphéist* and the monster of the River Ness, and I point to some further associations of Patrick that intertextually and ideologically become available to Columba's cultural imprint as well within the Gaelic polity thanks to the use of his story by St. Adomnán. I also see the association that St. Adomnán's St. Columba story makes with Christ: both with his name—associated, as we have seen, with the book of Matthew—and also with his travelling with "twelve."[13] In terms of Biblical typology, St. Patrick becomes the *type* of St. Columba, and St. Columba is made, via the text, the *anti-type* of St. Patrick. This process confers, via the text, the *Vita Columbae*, an ideological seal of approval and a sense of fateful inevitability and even divine sanction upon the life and political foundations of St. Columba as recorded by St. Adomnán. This was no doubt useful for St. Adomnán. Within the text of the *Vita*, Adomnán thus uses typology as an effective cultural-political/religious tool to establish hegemony. In the same way that Jonah in the Old Testament is set up theologically as a precursor or predictor of Christ, and Christ is seen as the *fulfillment*, so St. Patrick is placed into the same position vis-à-vis St. Columba (Jonah-to-Christ), which establishes an unspoken but structurally active comparison in the cultural psychology of the Gaelic linguistic community with political, ideological and hegemonic ramifications and *without ever having to actually say it.* It is always already accomplished *structurally*—an unspoken ideological *fait acompli*. Without the need for

actual argument or persuasion, a deep subconscious association is established. St. Columba's fateful saintly character is thus, in narratological terms, *overdetermined* by his multiple links to the character of Patrick, also *additionally* by his link to Jesus by having twelve followers go with him to Iona (again, whether this is true or not, it is a great opportunity in hagiography) and by his own good work and the further good work of the churches he established before he died. In particular, then, his reputation is subconsciously and intertextually overdetermined. There also is ideological benefit from the typological connection with Patrick which gains Adomnán legitimacy. This special placement of St. Columba by St. Adomnán, his *Cenél Conaill* relative, is designed to pave the way for the Columban church to move forward politically within and without the Church at a time of competition with Roman practices, where the Columban Church was at odds with the Pope regarding doctrine, sought primacy within the British Isles, and sought also to extend its influence in terms of its unique monastic character (Löhr 2007, 35; Schäferdiek 2014, 58–69). Thanks to the Loch Ness/River Ness monster and to the typological link to Patrick, the *meaning* of Columba is overdetermined within a circle of simultaneous hermeneutic processes moving *forward* diachronically and *outward* synchronically.[14]

We should stop looking, literally, for a real monster, for a kind of dragon or horse or *whatever*, because it was only a way *then* of establishing hegemony via manipulation by means of intertext, symbolism and analogy. This semiotic typological intertext to Patrick, the premier *Irish* saint, sends a message: "I am the new 'Patrick,' equal or similar (or similarly important), the successor to Patrick *here*, in Ireland."[15] The intertext further establishes legitimacy indicating that Columba is tied, in direct and also in subtle ways, to Patrick: "I am like Patrick, and I am, politically, rightfully seen as carrying the *mantle* of Patrick. I am the successor of Patrick. Thus I subtly benefit from Patrick's reputation as well as from my own, and I share and benefit from any cultural and contextual momentum such an association or part-taking gives me." All of this is powerfully but perhaps subliminally implied. To continue this suggestive illustrative monolog: "Together with a lack of meta-awareness on the part of the people, this all makes my popularity an accomplished fact in the popular mind. It is as though I jump on an already moving wagon, if you will, the reputation of St. Patrick, and then take that good wagon where I want it to go. I, Columba, am the new Patrick. Thanks to Patrick, people assume that I too can out-perform Finn and Fergus, that I can bless and live rather than fight and die." Simultaneously, he is a

Christian answer to the tradition of Thor. Of course, it is St. Adomnán who is really "driving the wagon"![16]

There is no literal functionality to monster stories as recorders of actual events *in situ* at Loch Ness. An actual event has nothing to do with the Loch Ness monster. In actuality, the monster never was, and the story? It never happened! There is, however, an earlier and different "snake" overlay from a now marginalized Celtic culture—but it is lost unless recovered via textual and cultural archeology.[17] Obscured and obfuscated, that suppressed overlay is replaced with a different overlay from today. As Jauss points out, readers carry with them a specific mental set, a "horizon of expectations," which is the perspective from which each reader, at any given time or at any given point in history, reads (Griswold 2012, 87). From a Barthesian point of view, we may naïvely assume that the Loch Ness monster exists, bringing to bear the cultural codes now current, and assume *that* naïve reality without further thought—and grab our telephoto camera and head for the Loch to "take some pictures" (Barthes 2012)! Pictures of nothing! Because modern values and catalogs of information that seem self-evidently true or natural by their very use are the real monsters here, together with a lack of self-reflexive sophistication and a modern susceptibility to meta-failure. This is a monstrous process because—from a Marxist point of view—this is how hegemonic obfuscation happens. Ireland in Scotland obfuscated, unknown after English colonialism and English linguistic dominance and media expansion: *extreme marginalization*.

So, the original River Ness monster of Adomnán was a key structural component enabling an active process of Christian syncretic overlay. The story of St. Columba and the River Ness monster also implicitly *links* the later Columban politico-cultural mission (Derry/Iona) to its model, the earlier prestige one, that of St. Patrick/Armagh, and also simultaneously implicitly links the boundary—extreme Scotland—with the cultural center (from this point of view): Ireland. So that conquest in terms of ideas is, from a Derridean standpoint, *always already accomplished* by the telling of the story. There is no backing up. It is a narrative *fait acompli*. It has little to do with the nominal referent of the sign; nevertheless, it has everything to do, through allegorical symbolism and metaphor, with a coded effect that brilliantly anticipates reader-response. Our analysis here considers this process in conjunction with Druid snakes being banished and in conjunction with cultural contamination in Scotland (from a Gaelic point of view) by the mythology of the World Serpent from Norse and Anglo-Saxon, and its ideological effect in Ireland and Scotland.[18] These

connections continue to resonate today in popular culture in surprising and unpredictable ways because they operate now at a deep-structure level.

Regarding meaning, we can say again the answer is textual and is in other texts. It is intertextual in its origin and in its reference. It is, in a structuralist sense, bidirectional in that a positive feedback relationship exists between the texts involved in an intertextual relationship for as long as they continue to be read or talked about; it is a continuous, simultaneous, and ongoing cultural process always already accomplished, and yet also initiated, at the time a person reads or hears something from the text. Stories of St. Patrick and St. Columba have an ongoing intertextual relationship with each other, and each had an ongoing and predicable positive feedback relationship, before Colonialism, with the cultures that read them, the texts both influenced by and influencing their linguistic culture during the life of their linguistic community in an ongoing hermeneutical relationship. Meaning is textual but obtained by the reader via a process of intertextuality within what Heidegger, Gadamer and Weber refer to as the "hermeneutic circle" (Heidegger 2010, 7–8; Gadamer 2013, xxxii; Bauman 2010, 68–80).[19] So the story of the Loch Ness monster, inasmuch as it is pinned, post-1933, on the much earlier story of St. Columba's experience on the River Ness, is not *real* or *functionally* reflective of something that actually happened at that location at a certain time; rather, it never happened there at all, the implication being that the Loch Ness monster does not exist at Loch Ness and has nothing to do with Loch Ness in any necessary way any more than that there are necessarily water beasties at any given Celtic lake. But it did happen *structurally* in the sense that it *had* to happen in order to raise St. Columba into the trinity of saints (Brigid, Patrick, and Columba) and place him among the twelve apostles of the holy island of Ireland (Biblical intertext). So, intertextually, find whatever meaning the loch monsters and snakes had for St. Patrick (and they did) and *that* is the meaning of the Loch Ness monster for St. Columba (as interpreted by St. Adomnán).[20] The Loch Ness/River Ness monster appears to be an unbracketed textual artifact of vestigial character, but also to have been an ideological product at its textual point of origin (Chandler 2007, 23).[21]

In spite of the loss of the lumbering plesiosaur, I like the (rediscovered) *Celtic* monster: when the Nessie story gets repositioned next to Patrick/Columba, it becomes less dragon-like (sea monster/plesiosaur) and more vague, magical, and Celtic. And we *can* say that the Gaelic was obfuscated because of two words: *coarb* and *erenach*.[22] The archeology of the text reverses a fallacious cultural process by revealing the more

interesting recovered ideology and revealing this insidious process of ideologically-driven anachronism and obfuscation.

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Notes

[1] There is also, strangely from today’s standpoint, no entry for a “Loch Ness monster” in the 11th edition of Encyclopedia Britannica (1910–11), and there is no mention of any monster under any entry for Loch Ness itself and no mention of a monster in the extensive entry for St. Columba, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/31855.

[2] The previous existence of plesiosaurs in the very ancient past “demands” that reports of a monster in Loch Ness are true and explained as surviving plesiosaurs: the temptation is to accept this suggestion for aesthetic reasons and to take it at face value as an “automatic” assumption, probably supported also with English cultural images from the nautical past of “sea serpents” (Coleman and Trumbore 2003, 50–3). Yet it must be said here that these are fossils from the Triassic to the Cretaceous periods, the youngest being from 65 million years ago, and not in any way recent bones (Vincent and Benson 2012, 1049–1063). Also, since what is now Scotland was covered with thick glacial ice until the end of the last Ice Age, there was literally no Scottish loch in existence at all until, at the earliest, 12,000 years ago (Edwards and Ralston 2003, 23–33). So it is highly unlikely that aquatic plesiosaurs roamed the top of the Ice Sheet for millions of years waiting for the loch which would become Loch Ness to form, all this while leaving no physical remains during all that time. So it is highly unlikely, but people point to some other rare but surviving dinosaur-era creatures such as Hagfish, Lampreys and Coelacanths and say “possible,” “making” it reality (Smith, Saha and Amemiya 2010 130–37; Naville, Chalopin and Volff 2014, 1–19).

[3] Folklore “is a bridge between literate and non-literate societies” (Bascom 1965, 26).

[4] The point being that the “Cherry Tree” story was not strictly factual, but still important.

[5] Vs. the exaggerated *claims* for a “Beowulf” or a “King Arthur.”

[6] For two excellent discussions of hard and soft applications of linguistic determinism in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis see Chandler (2016) and Badhesha (2002). The Welsh Ceffyl Dŵr and the Manx Cabyll-ushtey are Celtic water-horses.

[7] The Scots being fellow Gaelic speakers under the influence of the Columban church and its associated *Uí Néill* tribal aristocracy.

[8] Adomnán’s Columban church *familia* was simultaneously leading the expansion of Gaelic speakers into what is now Scotland (the “Scots” of Dal Riata who eventually gave their name to “Scotland”) and also leading an ecclesiastical expansion into English territory in the sense of the Columban church vying for a political supremacy of influence vs. the then Kentish church in their disagreements over doctrine and practice: this political contest saw the extent of the Columban

Church expansion go as far south as Durham in Northumbria, but also saw *total consolidation* within the emerging Scotland when the son of Crinan, the Columban Abbot of Dunkeld (or of Dull), established a new line of Kings of Scots in1034 (Lehane 2005, 121–46). The question which comes up in relation to the "Columban legacy in Scotland" has to do with Crinan, who married Bethoc, daughter and heiress of Malcolm II (their son was Duncan I, King Duncan in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and their grandson was Malcolm III—*Maol Choluim*, "servant of St. Columba"): was Crinan of the *Cenél Conaill*, like Columba himself and like other especially early Columban abbots at Iona, Kells and Derry, or was he of the *Cenél nEógain*? Though Moncrieffe tentatively suggested that Crinan, as Abbot of Dunkeld, might reasonably be expected to be of the *Cenél Conaill*, the so-called "Kindred of St. Columba" (Moncreiffe 1984), DNA evidence of all the families traditionally descended from Crinan in the male line (MacConnachie, Duncan, Robertson, Reid, Gray, Hume, Dunbar, Dundas, MacAulay, Washington, etc.) suggests rather that they were of the *Cenél nEógain*, in other words, that they were politically aligned with the O'Neills, O'Cahans and MacLoughlins of Tyrone, Derry, and Inishowen rather than with the O'Donnells of Tirconnell—modern Donegal (Ysearch.org). The *Cenél nEógain* had possession of the Abbey of Derry from at least the 11th and 12th centuries, and made it the chief Columban House—supplying it with abbots from their kindred such as *Maol Choluim Ó Brolcháin*, *Maol Choluim Ó Branáin* and *Eógan* and *Giolla Críost Ó Cearnaigh*, and sending *Domhnall Ó Brolcháin* to serve as abbot of Iona as well (Lacey 2013, 51–74). The same could be said for Dunkeld, where *Donnchadh* (Duncan)—a not uncommon name among the *Cenél Conaill* and *Cenél nEógain* (i.e., in the *Ó Cléirigh* Book of Genealogies)—was a favorite name. A *Cenél nEógain* affiliation on the part of Crinan's Dunkeld kindred would help explain the process at work behind several remarkable events in the history of Ireland and Scotland—in both directions—including the Derry/*Cenél nEógain* "takeover" of Iona in 1204 and the Scottish invasion of Derry and Inishowen by the Crinan-related Earl of Atholl and Mormaer of the Lennox between 1210 and 1215 in support of the House of Dunkeld during the MacWillam wars, where the MacLoughlin faction of the *Cenél nEógain* probably supported the MacWilliams, while the O'Neills, allied with the O'Donnells (as at the later battle of Caim-Eirge in 1241), probably supported William the Lion (Oram 2011, 174). There was also the O'Neill involvement in the Scottish War of independence in the late 13th century culminating in the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 (and the grant of Kincardine O'Neil to Robert Bruce's O'Cahan and O'Neill allies), and, back to Ulster, Edward Bruce's campaigns in the North of Ireland. Robert and Edward Bruce, themselves descendants of Crinan, deployed the Brecbennoch or Reliquary of St. Columba, apparently to good effect, as a battle standard at Bannockburn.

[9] The first is structurally-derived and trope-oriented, the other literal and functionally situated, story-to-location (Levi-Straus 1983, 1–6 and 1995; Malinowski 2010, 114–17; Douglas 2002; Harris 1989).

[10] All these "Patrick" stories have a "bleed through" of the serpentine onto what is made neutral strategically, the River Ness monster of Columba, but which was probably a kelpie/water horse story at the location of Ness.

[11] Whatever tropic relation snakes here may have to the pre-Christian religion (as a subliminal cultural *propellant*, think of Celtic druids' serpent motifs similar to the Anglo-Saxon use and also *Jörmungandr* iconography in stone), the *activating* meaning here is the story of St. Honoratus of Lerins who gave Patrick, in training for his trip to Ireland, his staff, which Honoratus had used against his own snakes on the Island of Lerins (and the Biblical interexts 4 Exodus 2, 21 Numbers 6 and 20 Revelation 2) (Mulhall 1899, 395–96; Lundberg (2016); Beirne 2000).

[12] Columba's baptismal name, *Colm*, pronounced "colum," is the Gaelic for "dove"—his name later became, in Gaelic, *Colm Cille*, or "Dove of the Church." It sounds like possible cultural syncretism in this context in the sense that the two tropic alternatives in the structural and here religiously significant pair "Snake/Dove" are called to be resolved "equally" within the reading or its addressed subject.

[13] Asymmetrical with and yet eventually in addition to this "St. Columba is like St. Patrick" or "St. Columba is the new St. Patrick" idea is the apparently common trope of "one followed by twelve," but outside and before (or after!) Adomnán's agenda: St. Willibrord went to Friesland in 690 with twelve missionaries while, along with Patrick as the "Apostle of Ireland," there are twelve apostles of Ireland of which Columba is one (Todd 1864, 47, 98–148).

[14] The meaning of Columba is the meaning of his story and his "saint's cult": The cult of St. Columba figured in the politics of Ireland during the Gaelic period—particularly in the competition between Derry (the cult of Columba) and Armagh (the cult of Patrick) for ecclesiastical/political prestige in Ulster and Ireland generally (Clarkson 2012, 178).

[15] That is to say in Gaeldom, for most of Columba's monastic foundations are on the Patrician Island, Ireland, not in Dalriata in Scotland.

[16] Of course, we might think that there must have been other Irish or Gaelic saint's cults vying for primacy, otherwise we could say that there would have been no need for such attempts at persuasion. There were: the Columban familia, eventually seated either at Derry or Iona, had that competition in Ireland (mainly from the Coarb of Patrick at Armagh) and also in Scotland (mainly from the cults of Máel Ruba, Ninian, and Moluag).

[17] A never-ending process accomplished within etic limitations.

[18] *Fergus mac Leti* is clearly Thor; Thor is *Fergus mac Leti*.

[19] Mark A. Wrathall discusses paradigmatic progression in Heidegger and provides a structural-functional reading of Heidegger's pragmatism vs. a pragmatist foundationalism, and he also discusses Gadamer's typology of interpretations (2013, 195–98).

[20] Meaning is *to the side* or elsewhere, but intertextual in several other directions too, and now that we see this process working here, we can apply this understanding to *other* texts, and potentially, to *any* texts.

[21] For Watt's concept of "delayed decoding" see the entry in Knowles and Moore (2000, 103–4).
[22] These are two key concepts that really define the time of Adomnán and Columba, but which are found mostly missing from modern discussions of Scottish history, literature or folklore.